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ABSTRACT

The interdisciplinary nature of the literature of American library history indicates that much of the best literature in the field is published in journals which do not fit within the familiar confines of "Library Literature." To illustrate the difficulties, a bibliography of 170 items relating to Pennsylvania library history was checked against "Library Literature," "Writings on American History," and "America: History and Life." Only 93 of the 170 entries were located in these sources. The author suggests broadening the coverage of "Library Literature," publication of an annual review of the literature of American library history, and the preparation of a comprehensive bibliography of American library history, as remedies for this lack of coverage. The author concludes that the absence of these essential tools has hindered collection building in the field and has led to considerable duplication of research. (Related papers appear as LI 002 796 - LI 002 798 and LI 002 800 - LI 002 808.) (Author/AB)

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FUGITIVE LITERATURE IN LIBRARY SCIENCE:

AMERICAN LIBRARY HISTORY AS A TEST CASE

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CONFERENCE ON THE BIBLIOGRAPHIC CONTROL
OF LIBRARY SCIENCE LITERATURE

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I.

Some time ago in an article on cataloging and classification David Weber observed that librarianship is a sociological art, meaning that it is interdisciplinary in nature in that it draws much of its content and method from other disciplines.[1] In the context of this conference the interdisciplinary nature of librarianship is significant, and when speaking of the literature of American library history we find this factor is in many ways even more pronounced than in other areas of library science. For the literature of American library history is diffuse and is scattered at random across such areas as librarianship, history, education, literature and journalism.

Due to this fact we find the results of this research in almost every conceivable type of publication, many of which don't fit within the familiar confines of library literature. For instance, over the past several years some of the best articles on American library history have appeared in such journals as The Transactions of the American Philosophical Society,[2] The North Dakota Quarterly,[3] Pennsylvania History,[4] and The Indiana Magazine of History.[5] At the same time we

[1]David C. Weber, "The Changing Character of the Catalog in America," Library Quarterly, XXXIV (1964), p. 20.

[2]Margaret Barton Korty, "Benjamin Franklin and Eighteenth Century American Libraries," Transactions of the American Philosophical Society newseries LV (December, 1965), whole issue.

[3]Glenn Brudvig, "The Development of Public Library Service in North Dakota," North Dakota Quarterly, XXI (1963), 61-66.

[4]Haynes McMullen, "The Founding of Social Libraries in Pennsylvania 1731-1876," Pennsylvania History, XXXII (1965), 130-152.

[5]J. Robert Constantine (ed.) "The Vincennes Library Company: A Cultural Institution in Pioneer Indiana," Indiana Magazine of History, of History, LXI (1965), 305-389, LXII (1966), 121-154, 305-344; LXIII (1967), 125-154.

have seen a number of excellent book-length studies emanating from presses that would not ordinarily be expected to publish materials on library science, such as the University of North Carolina Press, The Bucknell University Press, and the Texas Gulf Coast Historical Association.

Besides these obvious forms of of publication--books and periodical articles--the literature of American library history is often encountered in several other forms. One of the most significant is that of unpublished theses and dissertations written for degrees in history, education, and library science. Over 500 such papers have been written in the past 40 years. In 1966 twenty theses and four dissertations were written on American library history.

Another important form, and one that is often overlooked by librarians, is the monographic study of local public library history published by local libraries themselves. A number of such studies appear each year and most of them prove to be valuable even if they usually do not reach the quality desired of historical research.[6]

[6]For example see: Eleanor Sterling Clark, The Orange Public Library, 1883-1958, Orange, N.J.: Orange Free Library, 1958; Elizabeth J. Hodges, A History of the Leominister Public Library. Leominister, Mass.: Leominister Public Library, 1957; Paul S. Ballance (comp.) The First Fifty Years of Public Library Service in Winston-Salem 1906-1956. Winston-Salem, N.C. Public Library of Winston-Salem, 1957; Frances Boyd, A History of Public Library Service in Terre Haute and Vigo County, Indiana from 1823-1966. Terre Haute, Indiana: Fairbanks - Vigo County Public Library, [1967].

It also appears, from an examination of the increased rate of publication in the field of American library history, that there is a growing interest in the subject. After a brief lag during the fifties, research and publication in this field is again on the upswing. Books and periodical articles are appearing in profusion. It also looks as if the curve will continue to climb over the next decade or two. One reason is that there has been a great increase in the number of Ph.D. candidates in library schools, due to Title II of the Higher Education Act, and many of these students will be writing dissertations dealing with American library history. At least in the past, American library history has been one of the most popular topics for dissertation research among doctoral candidates in library science. Another factor involved is that many professional historians are now beginning to take an interest in library history. The reason is that American intellectual history, a new field in itself, is finally gaining a firm foothold.

The historians of American intellectual and cultural development must, of course, deal with books and libraries as factors in that development. However, these historians do not deal with the library as an isolated phenomenon, but rather deal with it in relation to broader treatments of American cultural history. Thus much good library history is buried in studies that would not at first glance seem to deal with libraries.[7]

[7]For example see: Richard Beale Davis, Intellectual Life in Jefferson's Virginia, 1790-1830. Chapel Hill; U. of North Carolina Press, 1964. Chapter III "Reading and Libraries."

Despite this new interest in library history on the part of professional historians it does appear that there has been some concentration of the items on American library history in a single field as librarianship has developed into a definite discipline with its own professional literature. The Library Quarterly and more recently the Journal of Library History have contributed greatly to this concentration. The success of the Journal of Library History, and its concomitant growth in prestige, has tended to act as a magnet to papers on library history, many of which would have been published in non-library journals prior to 1966.

Nevertheless, in the light of increasing research and publication on American library history, the many forms of publication, and the interdisciplinary nature of the publications involved, we continue to foresee serious problems in the control of this literature. This fact is of special significance when we consider the inadequate state of the bibliographic apparatus now at hand. Inadequate is a serious criticism when applied to a bibliography, for it indicates insufficient coverage, inaccuracies, or difficulties in arrangement, and for a bibliography these are fatal shortcomings. And yet this is precisely the situation which presents itself to those attempting to keep abreast of publications on American library history by means of the standard bibliographies of library literature.

The problem is that the basic bibliographies of library literature index only those publications more or less directly related to library matters. Unfortunately, a great number of the most significant publications on American library history do not appear within these closely, and conveniently, defined limits. The logical rejoinder here has been to point out that other disciplines index their own publications, even those dealing with American library history. Unhappily, again, the bibliographic apparatus available in other disciplines is equally inadequate--especially as related to American library history.

II.

Perhaps this is the point at which we should briefly examine the bibliographic apparatus available to the researcher in American library history. In the area of broad coverage there are five tools, three covering the library literature, and two covering American historical writings. Those covering library literature are, of course: (1) Burton and Vosburgh, Bibliography of Librarianship; (2) Cannon, Bibliography of Library Economy; and (3) Library Literature; while those in American history are: (1) Writings on American History; and (2) America: History and Life.

At first glance one would think that these five tools should provide ample coverage of the literature on American library history. In reality, they prove inadequate due to incomplete coverage and problems inherent in their arrangement.

By way of illustration, let us consider a bibliography of Pennsylvania library history recently prepared in relation to this author's research on that state's library history.[8] This bibliography gathered over a period of years was checked against the previously mentioned bibliographies to test their coverage of this phase of American library history. Burton and Cannon proved of no value at all. This left us with Library Literature, Writings on American History, and America: History and Life. Let us consider their coverage individually.

Library Literature listed only 50 of the 170 entries in our bibliography. The items included were papers in library journals such as Pennsylvania Library Notes, Library Quarterly, and the Journal of Library History, plus several books and numerous theses written in accredited graduate library schools. The coverage of Library Literature was quite complete within its limited scope, that is, its coverage of library publications only. However, serious problems arise in relation to location of the items listed therein. For example, in the volume covering 1955 to 1957, a very productive period for the writing of Pennsylvania library history, Library Literature listed 20 items relating to the subject. Unfortunately, it would take extreme diligence and great creative ability to locate them all. Say that a user of

[8]Michael H. Harris, "Pennsylvania Library History: A Bibliography," (In Press, PLA Bulletin).

Library Literature wanted to locate all of the items on Pennsylvania library history. Logically he would look under "Pennsylvania--libraries, history." Unfortunately, this effort would not meet with success, for there is no such heading. Thus the user would be forced to look under the name of every possible public, college, and special library in Pennsylvania to be sure that he hadn't missed anything. If he did so he would find articles, books, and theses on Pennsylvania library history under 12 different subject headings. Then, of course, he would remember to check under "Franklin, Benjamin" to find several more entries. All this done the exhausted user might feel that he had wrung every last entry out of this faithful tool, but not if he has had much experience with it. For in reality he has missed four works on Pennsylvania library history: one on the Chester County Library listed under "County libraries," one on the Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary Library listed under "Theological seminary libraries," and one on a noted Philadelphia book collector listed under "Collectors." Then there is the paper on the history of the Pennsylvania Hospital Library listed under author only!

Having completed a search of Library Literature our hypothetical researcher must now turn to a second bibliographic source--Writings on American History. If he does so, and examines the entries under "Libraries" in the volumes for 1955, 1956, and 1957 he will find that there are 11 papers, several very significant, that were not listed in Library Literature. They include a book-length study of the Library Company of

Philadelphia, a history of the cataloguing department in the University of Pennsylvania Library, and several papers on Benjamin Franklin and libraries. If the user has had any experience with this tool he will suspect that he has still missed a number of items dealing with Pennsylvania library history. This is due to the fact that the papers dealing with library history often are not cited in the section "Libraries," but instead appear elsewhere. Since we already had the authors of the papers on Pennsylvania library history published between 1955 and 1957, we were able to locate them through the author index, something our hypothetical scholar using a subject approach could not do. In doing so we found five more papers dealing with Pennsylvania library history. They were listed in the sections devoted to "Philadelphia," "Comparative Literature," "Historical Materials: Lists and Descriptions," and "Collectors." Thus we have sixteen items on Pennsylvania library history published in 1956-1957 which could not be located through Library Literature. One should not be too surprised, however, for Writings on American History listed 42 items on Pennsylvania library history from 1902 to 1957, most of which were not to be found in Library Literature. Nearly all of these items were published in state historical society journals not indexed by Library Literature.

A final general bibliographic source to be examined by our hypothetical scholar would be America: History and Life.[9] Since the

[9]A careful researcher would also examine state bibliographies, bibliographies in books on Pennsylvania history, and footnotes in papers on Pennsylvania libraries. Unfortunately these items tend to vary in quality from state to state.

last published volume of Writings on American History covers the year 1957, he will want to consult a bibliography which covers the years since then. Unfortunately, America: History and Life began publication in 1964, and no one has yet filled this six year gap in coverage.

Furthermore, upon examination of the first three volumes of America: History and Life the user will be dissapointed in its coverage of American library history. The section on "Archives, Libraries, Museums and Collections," is in the third number of each volume and is quite extensive. However, the coverage tends to be orientated more to current problems than history. Over half of the entries in each issue examined were found to deal with automation, information science, or current acquisitions in major research libraries. Only a few items relating to American library history are listed, and only one item on Pennsylvania library history is to be found.

Now if our scholar has been sufficiently diligent he will have uncovered 93 of the 170 entries in our bibliography of Pennsylvania library history. Not a very good percentage, but illustrative of the difficulties faced by anyone interested in research on American library history.[10]

[10]It should be noted that some items were published in the 19th Century, and thus could not be expected to be included in Library Literature and Writings on American History which both began in the 20th Century.

The inadequacies of the broad coverage bibliographies have been somewhat dimished by the appearance of specialized bibliographies and essays on various phases of American library history. An excellent critical essay on the literature of American library history was written by Jesse Shera for the Library Quarterly, but it does not, of course, cover the many studies completed in this country since its publication in 1945.[11] Several brief, but useful, essays have been written on scholarly libraries in the United States, and one general essay has been prepared on the bibliographical guides to the history of American libraries.[12] At the same time, a number of bibliographies of state library history have been completed or are in the process of compilation, and we now have a complete bibliography of the masters and doctoral dissertations written on American library history through 1965.[13] All of these efforts are welcome, but a great deal still needs to be done.

Thus librarians, of all people, find themselves faced with a serious problem in the control of the literature dealing with their

[11]Jesse H. Shera, "The Literature of American Library History," Library Quarterly, XV (1945), 1-24.

[12]Nathaniel Stewart, "Sources for the Study of American College Library History, 1800-1876" Library Quarterly, XIII (1943), 227-231; Harry Bach, Bibliographical Essay on the History of Scholarly Libraries in the United States, 1800 to the Present. University of Illinois Library School. Occasional Papers #54 (January, 1959), 24 pp; and Barbara Bronson, Bibliograpbical Guides to the History of American Libraries. University of Illinois Library School. Occasional Papers #32 (February, 1953), 11 pp.

[13]Michael H. Harris, A Guide to Research in American Library History, (To be published by Scarecrow Press in March 1968).

own history. In the face of inadequate and poorly arranged broad coverage bibliographies and the lack of specialized essays and bibliographies, the following suggestions are offered as a means of improving the coverage of the literature in this area.

III

In considering the improvement of bibliographic control of the literature of American library history we must begin with Library Literature, for it is, despite its inadequacies, the tool most often consulted by those interested in librarianship. As indicated above the basic problems involved are incomplete coverage and subject arrangement.

The first problem is the most difficult to remedy. In order to make Library Literature approach nearly complete coverage of American library history it would require an extensive indexing effort that would yield a rather small return. For, while a number of significant articles appear each year in historical, literary, and education journals, the number in relation to the total contents of those journals is still relatively small.

The situation might best be dealt with through the utilization of a contributor system. These contributors, who would logically be interested library historians, would systematically analyze the journals assigned to them and submit pertinent items for inclusion in Library Literature. Such a venture might be a joint project organized

by the editors of Library Literature in cooperation with the American Library History Roundtable or the Journal of Library History.[14] Such a cooperative project would greatly increase Library Literature's coverage of American library history.

The problem with the subject arrangement of Library Literature focuses on the lack of adequate cross references. As we indicated in our analysis of Library Literature's coverage of Pennsylvania library history, 1955-1957, it is extremely difficult to locate items pertinent to the subject due to the lack of cross references. How much simpler it would have been if cross references had been provided from a heading such as "Pennsylvania--libraries, history" to the nearly 20 subject headings under which one finds material on that subject.

I hesitate to be more specific in this regard, and would rather like to think that the experienced indexers on the staff of Library Literature could solve this problem if they became concerned enough.

Another way in which the control of the literature of American library history might be improved is through the preparation of a critical essay on each year's work in the field. Indeed, such a project has been under consideration by the Journal of Library History for some time, and may bear fruit in 1968. However, the preparation of a critical and selective essay each year would not negate the need for a comprehensive listing in Library Literature.

[14]Mrs. Martha Jane Zackert, an associate editor of the Journal of Library History, has been interested in this problem for some time.

Another useful item yet to be added to the librarian's bibliographic arsenal is a comprehensive bibliography of American library history. Such a bibliography would contain well over 3,000 entries and would require considerable effort in compilation. Perhaps the American Library History Roundtable will follow the lead of the Library History Group of the [British] Library Association which is currently involved in a cooperative project aimed at producing a comprehensive bibliography of English library history.[15]

There is also a serious need for bibliographies and critical essays dealing with the literature on special phases of American library history. Bibliographies of state library history, library education, childrens services, reference work, etc., would prove useful to the librarian and historian alike, and works of this type would facilitate the preparation of a comprehensive bibliography on American library history.

IV

The absence of these essential tools has contributed to the librarian's characteristic lack of understanding and knowledge of his own history. It has also led to duplication and a good deal of misguided

[15]The efforts of The Library Association are certainly welcome, since it is extremely difficult to track down the literature on English library history. Several significant recent developments include the founding of Library History a new journal, and the publication of James G. Olle's book entitled Library History (London: Clive Bingley, 1967), which is a good guide to the literature of library history, but with a definite emphasis on English library development.

effort. James G. Ollé summed up our difficulties when he wrote that due to the lack of adequate bibliographic coverage we don't know what has been done in the past and are unable to accurately assess what should be done in the future.[16]

An equally serious consequence of this inadequate coverage is that many significant publications are overlooked by library school librarians and faculty when they are planning purchases for their collections. This partially explains the lack of quality collections of materials relating to American library history.[17]

Since several of the participants at this conference will be dealing with library school collections, my comments will be brief and will only deal with a few specific areas: first, several deficiencies in the library science collections that seem, at least to me, to call for prompt attention from library school librarians and faculty; second, the relationship of the library school collection to the main library's holdings; and last, a mention of some libraries which are often overlooked as sources of materials on American library history.

[16]Ollé, ibid, p. 9.

[17]The best collections of materials relating to American library history in library school libraries are at Columbia, Illinois, Chicago, Western Reserve, Indiana and Florida State. The collection at Columbia is one of the best and by far the most useful due to the publication of The Dictionary Catalog of the Library of the School of Library Service, Columbia University. 7 vols. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1962.

One of the most serious deficiencies evident in library school collections is to be found in the area of manuscript records relating to the development of American librarianship. It has always puzzled me to find librarians involved in extensive, and often times expensive, programs aimed at gathering manuscript materials relating to almost every conceivable subject from the American presidency to the barbed wire fence, while at the same time showing almost no interest in preserving even the most significant of the original source materials relating to American library history.

As a historian I am disturbed at the thought of hundreds of influential librarians in the present and future who will end up destroying their records and correspondence because no American library showed any interest in collecting, organizing and preserving them. Indeed, one of the major reasons for the dearth of solid biographical research on great American librarians of the past can be directly attributed to the absence of any original sources upon which to base such studies.[18] It will be up to library school librarians and faculty to initiate collection programs in this area for it has been amply shown that the profession in general has little interest in the matter.

Concern for this shortage of source materials has stimulated a few librarians into considering "Oral Library History" as a means of gathering this material. Some progress is being made in this area

[18]Edward Holley, "Neglect of the Greats, Some Observations on the Problems of Writing the Biographies of American Librarians," Library Journal, LXXXVIII (1963), 3547.

as witnessed by Elizabeth Dixon's recent description of the "Oral Library History" program being pursued by the California Library Association.[19] Miss Dixon, using the Journal of Library History as a forum, has done a great deal in bringing this possibility to the attention of the profession, but it remains for the larger library schools and the national, regional and state library associations to institute oral library history programs on any broad scale.[20] Programs initiated on such a basis would generate source materials which would prove invaluable to future library historians, and save much of our heritage from oblivion.

Another area where library school librarians have been especially remiss is in the collection of the annual reports of libraries. Only the University of Illinois Library School has made a systematic effort in this area. Far too often I am told by library school librarians that there is no need to collect such reports on a large scale since they are all available in the libraries responsible for their original publication. I am often tempted to inquire how often they think a business librarian

[19]Miss Dixon is now editing a regular column on Oral History for the Journal of Library History; see especially her paper, "The Implications of Oral History in Library History," Journal of Library History I (1966), 59-62. For an example of the benefits of such a program see the article based on an interview with Miss Frances Richardson, a longtime California librarian, in Elizabeth Dixon "Oral History: Something new has been added," ibid, II (1967), 68-72.

[20]Library associations in this country have not been noted for their interest in history. This fact is painfully evident when one trys to make use of their archives. For a critical assessment of the current stateof affairs see Bill Woods "Library Association Archives and Library History," in John David Marshall (ed.) Approaches to Library History. Tallahassee, Florida: The Journal of Library History, 1966, pp. 49-60.

tells her clientele that there is no need to collect the annual reports of American corporations since they are all available from the corporations themselves. Although library annual reports are troublesome to procure, organize and preserve, and often are superficial, inaccurate, and prone to overstatement, they have always been an important source of information for the library historian. Large, well organized collections of such reports would greatly facilitate research on library development in the United States.

While library school librarians and faculty in general have shown little interest in collecting the original sources relating to American library history, they have also proven to be sadly uninformed about the valuable resources to be found in their main library holdings. Newspaper collections, census reports, and state historical society publications are just a few examples of the materials that are available to the library historian in any respectable academic library. The value of many lengthy research projects on American library history has been negated, at least in part, by the failure of authors to make use of important sources found outside the convenient confines of the library school collection. The provision of improved bibliographic apparatus in the field would help remove this problem.[21]

[21]It should be noted that a new clearing house for library and information science literature has been established in the library school at the University of Minnesota. But this center is expressly concerned with the report literature and other materials concerning current library problems. While this type of bibliographic center is seriously needed we doubt that it will solve many of the bibliographic problems faced by American library historians. See Wesley Simonton, "Clearinghouse for Library Science Literature," Wilson Library Bulletin, XLII (1967), 383-85.

Librarians have tended to be equally uninformed about the special collections relating to library history which are available in a number of libraries across the country. The Trumbull manuscript collection relating to early Connecticut libraries deposited at Yale University, the Keep manuscript collections on early New York libraries deposited in the New York Society Library, or the magnificent newspaper collections of the American Antiquarian Society, are just a few examples of this type of material. We look forward to the day when these collections, and many more, are well known to library school librarians and faculty, who will in turn bring them to the attention of students and other scholars doing research on American library history.

V

American librarians have shown a marked lack of interest in their own history. The pressure of administrative problems produced, at the turn of the twentieth century, librarians who were "Administrators and organizers, and others like them, who were acutely aware of the needs of the present but generally indifferent to the links with the past."[22] An indifference that has, in the eyes of many, proven to be costly in terms of both time and money.

This indifference is further illustrated by the librarian's neglect of the records which illuminate his own history. Thus we

[22]Shera, op, cit., p. 16.

find inadequate bibliographic coverage of the literature of American library history, and concomitantly the lack of quality collections of materials relating to the field.

It has been argued that one mark of a mature profession is an understanding and appreciation of its own history. If we accept this criterion, we must conclude that librarianship has not yet reached full maturity. But the profession does seem to be advancing in that direction. It would be tragic indeed, if we reached that point only to find that the sources necessary to an understanding and appreciation of our history had been lost.

December, 1967